



# Business Watch

April 2009

## Workplace Violence—On the Rise?



*It had been a few years since I had gotten a call requesting information about preventing workplace violence. During the first week of March I had three. A sign of the times? Probably.*

It used to be that the term “workplace violence” brought to mind bank robberies, convenience store hold-ups, and the occasional angry customer. Times have changed, and layoffs, unemployment, threats of foreclosure, and other economic crisis may affect otherwise stable employees in ways that are unanticipated.

Violence in the workplace is a fact in today’s world. Some job factors that may increase a worker’s risk for workplace assault include:

- Contact with the public
- Exchange of money
- Working with unstable or volatile persons in health care, social service or criminal justice settings
- Delivery of passengers, goods or services
- Working alone or in small numbers
- Guarding valuable property or possessions
- Working in high crime areas
- Working late at night or during early morning hours
- Having a mobile workplace such as a taxi cab
- Working in community-based settings (social services, etc.)



### Internal or External Threats?

Outside threats, such as robbery or a violent act by an angry customer, are often unpredictable. However, *employees* often give warning signs prior to becoming violent. Signals of impending violence may include:

- Fascination with violent events or empathy for violent people
- History of violence
- Drug or alcohol dependency or abuse
- Veiled or direct threats
- Extreme or bizarre behavior, marked anger or rage
- Notable decline in workplace performance, attendance and productivity
- Increased impact on supervisor time
- Theft or destruction of property
- Fascination or preoccupation with weapons, violence, or terrorism
- Inability to accept criticism
- Paranoia or belief that the system is unfair, pathological blaming of others

### Prevention Strategies

No single strategy is appropriate for all businesses, but all workers and employees should assess the risk of violence in their workplace and take action to reduce those risks. Steps to take include:

- Act in ways that may minimize violence (see page 4 for recommendations)
- Pre-employment screening, including a criminal history background check
- Train employees to recognize, report, and deal with conflict

*(continued on page 6)*

## Crimes Occurring on Business Property January through March

### COMMERCIAL ROBBERY / ROBBERY ON BUSINESS PROPERTY:

### LOSS

500 block Rainier Ave S 3:33 pm	Suspect entered the business and selected items for purchase. While the employee bagged the items, the suspect displayed a gun in his waistband and demanded the cash register be opened. The suspect fled with the cash and the unpaid items. Officers were unable to locate the suspect. <i>Crime Prevention Tip: Keep only as much cash in the register necessary to conduct business. All other cash should be stored in a timed-release safe. Post signs near the business entry stating "No more than \$50 in the register at any time."</i>	\$522
100 block SW 7th St 2:58 pm	The suspect asked for cigarettes. When the clerk turned to the suspect with the cigarettes he was confronted at gun point and told to get the cash out of the register. The suspect banged the gun on the counter telling the employee to hurry, then ordered the employee to lie down on the ground.	\$400
2900 block NE Sunset Blvd 11:50 am	Officers were dispatched to a commercial robbery. While en route, an officer spotted a subject wearing clothing similar to the suspect description. The subject was contacted and positively identified as the robber, who had given the employee a note demanding cash and displayed an object with wires that appeared could be a bomb. The suspect was booked for Felony Investigation of Robbery.	(recovered)
100 block Rainier Ave N 9:34 am	Officers responded to a report of a bank robbery with witnesses chasing the suspect. The suspect was positively identified by employees and was arrested for Felony Investigation of Robbery.	(recovered)
4000 block Talbot Rd S 11:30 am	Suspect displayed a gun and demanded prescription medications from the employee. Officers arrived to find the subject, with pill bottles stuffed in his jacket, had been taken into custody by private security guards. The subject was booked for Felony Investigation of Robbery.	(recovered)
300 block Renton Center Way SW, 10:35 am	The suspect displayed what appeared to be a hand grenade and gave the employee a note demanding money. Officers were unable to locate the suspect.	unknown
300 block Rainier Ave S 11:38 pm	When the employee opened the cash register to get change, the suspect grabbed numerous bills from the register and fled in a waiting vehicle. Follow up by detectives identified the suspect.	\$300
4500 block NE 4th St 12:55 pm	Suspect gave the employee a note that demanded money and warned the employee not to activate the alarm. Officers were unable to locate the suspect.	unknown

### COMMERCIAL BURGLARY:

17200 block 128th Ave SE	Suspect's removed screws from the door hasp to gain entry to the business, then stole computer equipment from an office. The reporting employee stated the business was burglarized using the same method of entry two months ago. There is no suspect information. <i>Crime Prevention Tip: Locks, lock hardware, and hinge pins should be installed inside the business whenever possible. If screws, hinge pins, or other security hardware can be accessed from the outside, measures such as drilling out the tops of the screws should be taken to reduce the likelihood of removing the hardware to gain entry.</i>	\$500
900 block Houser Way N	Entry to the business was gained via an unlocked door. Suspect/s removed a metal cash box from a secured box, extensively damaged two vending machines, and stole the cash from inside the machines. <i>Crime Prevention Tip: Unattended areas should be locked when not in direct view of an employee. If several people need access to the area, a cipher lock or electronic access card system should be installed.</i>	unknown
300 block Renton Center Way SW	The business owner arrived and unlocked the business door. Once inside he discovered a large hole in the drywall, through which he could clearly see the adjoining business. Entry was made to the adjoining business by damaging the door lock. Nothing was stolen from either business.	\$0
900 block S 3rd St	Report of stereo missing from the business. There was no sign of forced entry to the business. The closing employee noted that a door that is usually locked was unlocked at closing time. <i>Crime Prevention Tip: All doors and windows not in constant view of an employee should remain locked.</i>	\$125

## Help Wipe Out Graffiti!

### New Ordinance Gets Tough on Offenders

In the battle against graffiti, Renton City Council passed a new Graffiti Control Ordinance to help prosecute graffiti offenders and reduce the damages inflicted on property owners. In addition, the city has hired a part-time graffiti abatement coordinator to help manage the program, and is recruiting volunteers, partnering with local businesses and community members, providing graffiti-removal kits to graffiti victims with limited resources, and launching a comprehensive education campaign. "Graffiti is a crime and it costs governments and our communities thousands of dollars to clean it up," said Mayor Denis Law. "Our goal is to make people think twice before committing an act of vandalism in the first place, and make them pay the price."

When graffiti is found on private property, it is the property owner's responsibility to remove it within 48 hours. "Graffiti removal kits" are available for free to anyone who cannot afford to remove graffiti from the property. The kits are available at City Hall, the Renton Community Center, and other public facilities in Renton.

For more information, please contact Suzanne Dale Estey at 425-430-6591 or Bonnie Rerecich at 425-430-6624.



#### **Graffiti is a crime!**

*Over the course of the last few years there have been many incidents of graffiti or "tagging" in Renton.*

*Most residents and business owners agree that graffiti is unsightly, costly to clean up, and results in lost productivity for those who must restore the damaged areas.*

*Businesses are invited to "Team Up" and become a partner with the City of Renton to "Wipe out Graffiti."*

**For more information call**  
**Suzanne Dale Estey**  
**425-430-6591**  
**Bonnie Rerecich**  
**425-430-6624**

### **"Graffiti Partner" Opportunities**

**Businesses are invited to "Team Up" and become a partner with the City of Renton to "Wipe Out Graffiti"**

The City of Renton is seeking partners to join the city and local retailers, businesses and other organizations to prevent graffiti, provide resources, and help eradicate graffiti in the community.

#### **How you can help:**

- **Donate** products for graffiti removal kits to help those who have been victimized by graffiti and do not have the means to remove it.
- **Participate** in "Wipe-Out Graffiti," a proactive anti-graffiti education campaign to encourage the public to report graffiti, abate it quickly and volunteer for the city's anti-graffiti efforts.
- **Sponsor** volunteer opportunities for your employees and customers to help seniors and other residents with limited resources who are victims of graffiti.



#### **Graffiti Removal Kits**

Kits will be given to individuals who have become a victim of graffiti, but have limited means to deal with removing it. These kits will be made available at a number of public facilities at no charge.



#### **The following items are needed for each Graffiti Removal Kit:**

- Paint trim tray
- Disposable heavy duty towels
- One 3" foam brush
- One 4" foam brush
- One roll masking tape
- Medium duty scrubbing sponge (eg. Scotch-Brite no. 74)
- Cloth sand paper (#15)
- Three sets of disposable latex gloves
- Certificates for discounts from your store for up to \$5.00 on additional items for graffiti removal, including paint, brushes or paint removal products

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City of  
**Renton**





## ***Personal Conduct to Minimize Violence***

Follow these suggestions in your daily interactions with people to de-escalate potentially violent situations. If at any time a person's behavior starts to escalate beyond your comfort zone, **disengage**.

### **DO:**

- Project calmness; move and speak slowly, quietly, and confidently.
- Be an empathetic listener; encourage the person to talk and listen patiently.
- Focus your attention on the other person to let them know you are interested in what they have to say.
- Maintain a relaxed and yet attentive posture and position yourself at a right angle rather than directly in front of the person.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings.
- Ask for small, specific favors such as asking the person to move to a quieter area.
- Establish ground rules if unreasonable behavior persists. Calmly describe the consequences of any violent behavior.
- Use delaying tactics which will give the person time to calm down. For example, offer a cup of coffee or glass of water.
- Be reassuring and point out choices. Break big problems into smaller, more manageable pieces.
- Accept criticism in a positive way. When a complaint might be true, use statements like, "You're probably right." If the criticism seems unwarranted, ask clarifying questions.
- Ask for his recommendations. Repeat back to him what you think he's telling you.
- Arrange yourself so the person can't block your access to an exit.



### **DO NOT:**

- Use styles of communication that generate hostility, such as apathy, defensiveness, giving the "brush off" or the "runaround".
- Reject all their demands from the start.
- Pose in a challenging stance, such as standing directly opposite the person, crossing your arms, or placing hands on your hips. Avoid any physical contact, finger pointing, or long periods of fixed eye contact.
- Make sudden movements that can be seen as threatening. Pay attention to the tone, volume, and rate of your speech.
- Challenge, threaten, or dare the individual. Never belittle the person or make him feel foolish.
- Criticize or act impatiently toward the agitated individual.
- Attempt to bargain with a person making threats.
- Try to convince them their issue is less serious than it is.
- Make false statements or promises you can't keep.
- Try to impart a lot of technical or complicated information when emotions are high.
- Take sides or agree with distortions.
- Invade the person's physical space. Make sure there is a space of 3' to 6' between you and the person.



## Crimes on Business Property (continued)

### COMMERCIAL BURGLARIES, continued:

3200 block NE Sunset Blvd	Attempted burglary. Suspect/s removed the cover from a ventilation duct and damaged the tin tubing. The entry point was eight feet up with nowhere stable for someone to crawl in, and it does not appear entry was made. Suspect/s may have targeted the business in an attempt to gain entry (possibly through the drywall) to an adjacent jewelry store. <i>Crime Prevention Tip: Vent ducts should be secured to prevent illegal entry. We have seen several restaurant burglaries where the point of entry was a roof vent.</i>	\$0
3800 block NE 4th St	Officers responded to a burglary alarm to find fresh tire tracks and footprints. Suspect/s piled several pallets that were on the property to reach a building-mounted ladder, climbed up, and accessed the business by prying open the roof access door. Tools, a camera, and copper were stolen from the business. <i>Crime Prevention Tip: Building mounted ladders should be secured (a wood panel locked to cover the rungs, for example) to eliminate easy roof access. Items that can be climbed to reach the roof or building mounted ladder should not be stored in the area.</i>	\$914
10700 block SE Carr Rd	Employees arrived to find the safe missing and the cash register drawer pried open. Entry to the business was gained by prying a door lock. An ex-employee who had been stealing from the business is a possible suspect. <i>Crime Prevention Tip: Safes should be bolted down to make them difficult to remove. Cash should be removed from the cash register at the end of the workday, and register drawers should be visibly placed on the counter to indicate to passers-by that no money is left in the register.</i>	\$4,697
1400 block Monster Rd SW	Entry to the business was gained by kicking in a skylight. Two laptop computers owned by the business had been put into carrying cases and moved, indicating the intent of the suspect/s was to steal the laptops. Nothing was missing from the business, and the alarm was not tripped. <i>Crime Prevention Tip: If the business roof is easily accessed, skylights should be constructed of shatter-resistant products and/or treated with an application of Security Film. Security Film will increase the strength of the glass, greatly increasing the amount of effort a criminal must exert to force entry.</i>	\$0
4800 block Lake Washington Blvd N	Suspect/s cut a chain link fence to gain entry to the business property, then stole decorative retail products. <i>Crime Prevention Tip: Chain link fencing can be "reinforced" by running razor wire vertically through the fencing.</i>	\$80
4000 block NE 4th St	Officers responded to a commercial alarm and found a business door unlocked. It appears entry to the business was made through the ceiling crawl space, although there was no sign of forced entry to the building. Cash, coins, and the video tape from the security system were stolen. <i>Crime Prevention Tip: Cash should be stored in a locked safe. On-site security recordings should be secured against theft.</i>	\$500
500 block SW Grady Way	Employees arrived to find a window broken and an exterior door handle open. The suspect/s reached through the window and shut off all the breaker panels, turning off the lights and disabling the surveillance cameras, then unlocked the door adjacent to the window and entered via the door. Tools and diagnostic equipment were stolen from the business. <i>Crime Prevention Tip: Windows adjacent to electrical panels, doors/locks, or other vulnerable points should be fitted with an application of Security Film (see above).</i>	\$19,394

## CITY CONTACT INFORMATION

Information Desk	430-6400	City of Renton	Business Watch	430-7520
Economic Development	430-6592	<a href="http://www.rentonwa.gov">www.rentonwa.gov</a>	Block Watch	430-7521
Fire Prevention	430-7080		School Resource Officers	430-7514
Human Services	430-6650	Renton Chamber of Commerce	Police Administration	430-7535
City Clerk	430-6504	<a href="http://www.gorenton.com">www.gorenton.com</a>	Graffiti Abatement	430-7373
Utility Systems	430-6234		Animal Control	430-7550
Finance	430-6850		Community Services	430-6600

## RENTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

Renton Police Department  
Crime Prevention Unit  
1055 S Grady Way  
Renton, WA 98055  
Phone: (425) 430-7520  
Fax: (425) 430-7505  
E-mail the Editor at: [tvickers@rentonwa.gov](mailto:tvickers@rentonwa.gov)

## Workplace Violence (continued)

- Implement a written Workplace Violence policy that includes clear behavioral standards, zero tolerance, prevention programs and reporting procedures.
- Limit public access to work areas.
- Institute and review security procedures to be taken in the event of an incident
- Institute a weapons policy.



- Establish a staff code word or distress signal.
- Meet with local law enforcement officials for recommendations on

improving the physical security of your workplace.

Preparation is the first step towards prevention. Institute a workplace violence policy, and have a plan in the event that violence occurs.



Some excellent resources for information about workplace violence include:

[www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)  
[www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov)  
[www.crimeprevention.rutgers.edu](http://www.crimeprevention.rutgers.edu)  
[www.workplaceviolence911.com](http://www.workplaceviolence911.com)

*As the economy continues to falter, many workplace violence experts anticipate that there will be a rise in shootings. But the laid off worker may not be venting their frustrations on their previous employer. Many of those in distress will be seeking support from human services and upset about the mounting bills that they must pay. The employees that work with this public will need to prepare for the continuing increase in client aggression.*

*Johnny Lee, [Peaceatwork.org](http://Peaceatwork.org)*